

Research Paper—English



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A Theme of Alienation In Anita Desai's "Where Shall We Go This Summer".

A B S T R A C T

This paper is related to the problem or theme of alienation, in the novel Where Shall We Go This Summer? An illustrious novel by Anita Desai is a story of an oppressed mind. Like all her earlier novels this particular novel also illustrates the tenseness's between family members and the loneliness, isolation and alienation of the middle class woman, Sita, the female protagonist of the story, due to which there comes marital disharmony in her life. Due to which alienation and loneliness comes in the life of all other characters related to Sita like her husband and children. Sita, the protagonist faced with and unwanted fifth pregnancy goes away from Bombay along with her two children, Menaka and Karan, living behind her husband Raman in despair. In order to overcome the boredom of her life and to save her fifth child yet to born from the violence that she finds all around herself in the barren and dirty city Bombay, she goes to Manori, the utopian land which happens to be the homestead of her father. It is when Sita feels that she is again pregnant for the fifth time then the irritations and grittiness of life becomes somewhat heavy to bear for her. She makes an attempt to shut down emotionally and isolate herself from the daily chores. The catastrophe of the story lies where Sita is seen perturbed with the very idea of bringing another child, as it is indeed something more than what she can handle.

A Theme of Alienation In Anita Desai's "Where Shall We Go This Summer".

Anita Desai is one of the most popular novelists of India and she can be rightly compared with Iris Murdoch, Doris Lessing, Margaret Lawrence, Margaret Atwood and Flora Nwapa. In the most of her novels, Desai explores the sensibility, the inner workings of the mind of her characters. The conspicuous influence of Virginia Woolf remains deeply embedded in her novels. These provide a kind of microcosm of life, a sort of 'pseudomorphic Theatre' where her heroine can see her infinite variety. Even a gentle drilling into the mystical crusts of the psyche of her heroines reflects the oceanic vacuity, a never ending all pervasive loneliness and an abysmal despair from which they suffer.

Like all her earlier novels this particular novel also illustrates the tenseness's between family members and the loneliness, isolation and alienation of the middle class woman, Sita, the female protagonist of the story, due to which there comes marital disharmony in her life. Sita is highly emotional, sensitive and intellectual and freedom loving, finds it very difficult to live in patriarchal culture as well as in this practical civilized world. Sita felt alienated and suffocated due to the "vegetarian complacency, the stolidity", 'insularity' and unimaginative way of life of her husband, children and other people around her. As a result of her experiences, her life becomes boring and monotonous. She could not inwardly ac-

cept that this was all called as life, which life would continue thus, inside this small, enclosed arena, with these few characters churning around and then past her leaving her always in this gray, dull-lit, empty shell.

After her marriage Sita feels alienated and unbearable to live with her husband in, 'their age rotted flat', unbearable in that it is marked by 'sub-human placidity, calmness and sluggishness' and feels that 'their sub humanity might swamp her'. To remove her loneliness, alienation and to preserve her individuality, she behaves in a way, which appears to be outrageous to the other members of the family by smoking openly and talking 'in sudden rushes of emotion, as though flinging darts at their smooth, unscarred faces'.

Anita Desai symbolically shows the conflict in Sita's life through the image of a crowd of crows attacking an eagle, 'wounded or else too young to fly'. This trivial incident serves as an apt objective correlative to Sita's alienation from life as well as it explains her oversensitive nature and her disliking of violence in any form. Then Sita, Raman and children moved to a small flat but she doesn't find life any better as she has to endure visits by people whose "insularity and complacency as well as the aggression and violence of others" act as "affronts upon her tiring nerves". Further Sita becomes increasingly alienated from the world as she is paid little attention by her husband of his being absorbed in the manage-

ment of his business and her children because of their growing independent with the result that she is faced with intolerable boredom that can prove destructive. And the martial disharmony in her life is thus increased.

Accompanied by two her children, Sita escapes to Manori, the island of miracles, in desperation and disillusionment. Unable to bear the anguish of another pregnancy, she comes here in order not to give birth. The island house, deserted for twenty years, symbolizes her temperamental condition. As the island concretizes the feeling of isolation for Sita, she retreats into it as into a womb, with an obsessive desire to recapture once again her childhood innocence and purity. Obviously, her own frustration with her life in Bombay drives her in desire to provide her unborn infant with a world that is incorrupt. Sita is obsessed with her loveless marriage with Raman. Here marital relations as well as abnormal man-woman relationship have been portrayed with a remarkable poignancy. Sita is married woman and has four children, but in the very picture of misery and dejection. She feels herself to be a prisoner in a house which offers her nothing but a crust of dull tedium, of hopeless disappointment.

Her unhappiness in married life finds expression in feelings of contempt for the friends and colleagues of her husband. After unpacking her things and lying down with her children, Sita ruminates re-

calling her unhappy married life and her childhood spent on the island with her father who had become a legend in his lifetime having brought water from the well to the inhabitants of the island and taught them more profitable ways of framing. Her frequent return to her childhood days implies her refusal to grow up and accept the responsibilities of adult life and her inability to comprehend the past conspires against her marital harmony. Her alienation from all experience is due to her love for life and her reluctance to accept violence in any form. This trip for her is a trip of self identity and recognition of reality. Her memories of past and uncertainty of future have created a sense of dismay and disgust in her heart.

Sita's attempt to overcome her existential despair stemming from her alienation from her husband and her children, who long for the comforts and excitement of city life, proves abortive. Menaka writes to her father asking him to take them back as she has to apply for admission to the Medical College. Seeing how excited her children at the time of her husband's arrival Sita feels that they were being disloyal to her, disloyal to the island and its wild nature. Raman's arrival and the conversation that she has with him have the effect of confronting her with the stark actualities of life, which cannot be wished away. When Raman comes she wants to lay down her head and weep, but she is told that he has come not for her but for children.

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